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LETTER DATED 1 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AZERBAIJAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan on 27 February 1999 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Eldar KOULIEV
Permanent Representative

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Annex

[Original: Russian]

Statement issued on 27 February 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan

On 25 February 1999, at 1746 hours local time, a MIG-29 fighter of the Russian air force violated the airspace of Azerbaijan over the territory of Kelbadjar district, penetrating 15 kilometres into the country's airspace. Azerbaijan's anti-aircraft defence forces were put on alert. At 1748 hours, the Russian military aircraft left Azerbaijani airspace.

It is significant that the violation of Azerbaijani airspace occurred in Azerbaijan's Kelbadjar district, which is occupied by the armed forces of Armenia.

In connection with this incident, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan has been authorized to state the following:

Azerbaijan has repeatedly drawn the attention of the leaders of the Russian Federation to the fact that the Russian Federation's increasing military presence in Transcaucasia is not conducive to the strengthening of peace and stability in the region, where numerous conflicts are taking place. Moreover, the Russian Federation, which, together with France and the United States of America, has been a mediator in efforts to settle the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict - the most protracted conflict in the region - over the past few years, is unilaterally arming one of the parties to the conflict, Armenia, which has committed military aggression against Azerbaijan and has occupied 20 per cent of its territory.

These facts have long been common knowledge to the international community. They contradict the provisions of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council that prohibit the sending of arms and military equipment to the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict zone, since that could lead to an escalation of the conflict and undermine the peace process.

In spite of the many statements by Russian officials that the Russian Federation has halted its arms deliveries to Armenia and that Russian arms and military equipment in the territory of Armenia are intended exclusively for defence purposes, reality shows that the opposite is true.

Leaving aside the arguments advanced by the Russian and Armenian sides about the defensive purpose of MIG-29 military aircraft, which are known throughout the world as some of the most modern aircraft, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan wishes to draw attention to a recent statement by the commander-in-chief of the Russian air force, General A. Kornukov, made upon his arrival in Erevan on 17 February 1999 at the head of a Russian military delegation. Referring to deliveries of C-300 surface-to-air missile systems to the Russian military base in Armenia, General Kornukov said that "these deliveries are being made in the light of the threat from a neighbouring

State ... We cannot exclude the possibility of an intrusive flight, even if in error or apparently in error, into the territory of a sovereign State that is a party to the Treaty on Collective Security."

Regardless of what neighbouring State General Kornukov considered to be posing the so-called threat, it appears that the Russian Federation, claiming its right to defend the airspace of its ally - in this case, Armenia - can allow itself to violate the airspace of another sovereign State - Azerbaijan. And that is exactly what happened when the Russian military aircraft violated Azerbaijani airspace on 25 February 1999.

It is known that, as of 1 April 1999, Armenia will be included in the roster of the unified anti-aircraft defence system and, if an incident similar to the one that occurred on 25 February is perpetrated by Armenia, a country that is in a state of armed conflict with Azerbaijan, the consequences of such an incident are hard to foresee, particularly when one considers the military ties between the Russian Federation and Armenia.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan hopes that the Russian side will take all the necessary measures to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan considers it necessary to reiterate that developments in connection with the unilateral re-armament of Armenia, in which the Russian Federation is directly involved, is fraught with unpredictable consequences for the region of the south Caucasus.